

**Paper: Sacramento Bee, The (CA)**  
**Title: Prisons taking a dive, in a good way**  
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The **prison** system is overcrowded, understaffed and has an inmate health system that would have embarrassed the Spanish Inquisition.

But there are still rays of hope that crack through the gloom now and then, and one cracked through last Friday at the California Institution for Men in Chino. The **Prison** Industry Authority, which provides jobs and training for inmates, announced it was re-establishing the **prison's** commercial **diving** program.

The 11-month training program, which will accommodate about 100 participants, teaches inmates **diving** physics, underwater navigation, welding, blueprint reading, diesel engine mechanics and other skills.

True, teaching inmates to scuba dive sounds kind of nutty. But before it was sunk by budget woes in 2003, the program was one of the most successful in the system at helping ex-cons keep their heads above water -- so to speak -- after their release.

**Prison** officials say the recidivism rate for program graduates during the 33 years it operated was less than 12 percent, compared with about 70 percent for the system as a whole. The program's budget is \$300,000. If about a third of the men who start the program complete it, that's roughly \$10,000 per graduate.

That's about one-third the cost of keeping someone locked up for a year. And if only four of the program's grads come back instead of the 23 that might normally return to **prison**, that means taxpayers save \$570,000 a year. It's a start.